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SUBJECT: TURKISH DCHOD TELLS USTRANSCOM ANSWER ON CARGO HUB
COMING SOON; OPTIMISTIC ON IRAQ

REF: ANKARA 1952

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION ROBERT S. DEUTSCH FOR REASONS 1.
4 (B) AND (D)

1. (S) Summary: DCHOD Gen Basbug told USTRANSCOM Commander Gen Handy that he saw no insurmountable problems in the US-Turkey military-to-military relationship. To repair other parts of the relationship, Basbug thought the US should take action against the PKK/Kongra Gel in northern Iraq (something SACEUR hinted might be in the works in a recent conversation with the Turkish CHOD) and senior leaders in both countries should be more careful about their public statements. On Iraq, both generals were optimistic about the future. Basbug did not give Gen Handy an answer on the long-standing US request to establish a cargo hub at Incirlik, repeating that he thought an answer would come soon. He also reported that Turkey could not agree to DSACEUR's request to keep a C-130 in Afghanistan beyond its deployment period due to maintenance issues, and that he hoped to have a long conversation with VCJCS Gen Pace when Basbug goes to Washington in June for the HLDG and ATC meetings. End summary.

Iraq Key to Bilateral Relationship

2. (C) USTRANSCOM Commander General John Handy met with Turkish General Staff (TGS) Deputy Commander GEN Ilker Basbug on April 11. After discussing Gen Handy's impending retirement and some of the difficulties Turkish senior officers have with the transition to civilian life, Basbug raised the state of US-Turkey relations. He said that TGS was very happy with the numerous senior US military leaders who have visited since December. He was also pleased by his exchanged with EUCOM Deputy Commander Gen Wald. Basbug noted that in June he planned to be in the US to attend both the High Level Defense Group (HLDG) and the American Turkish Council (ATC) annual meeting. (Comment: Basbug may have been confused -- the HLDG is scheduled to be held in Ankara in June, but we expect this date to slip.) While in Washington, he hoped to have an extended opportunity to discuss various issues with VCJCS Gen Pace.

3. (C) One recent visitor to Turkey was SACEUR Gen Jones, who had lectured at the Turkish staff college two weeks earlier. Basbug recalled his meeting with Gen Jones there when Basbug opined that the relationship suffered from "misunderstanding" in public opinion, fed by speculation in the media in both countries. In his opinion, military-to-military cooperation was at a "good level." The bilateral relationship is "a unique one, and a very comprehensive one" which should be viewed from a long-term perspective, he said. Disagreement still occur on specific issues, of course, and the two sides need to reach agreement on them.

4. (C) Basbug said that he told Gen Jones that the issue of the PKK/Kongra Gel in northern Iraq most upset the Turkish public. To change public opinion, "you need to do something." The next most important factor shaping Turkish public opinion was events in Iraq itself. He explained to Jones that the military is "sensitive" in what it says in public, but politicians are "not so careful." He illustrated by referencing SECDEF's comments last month that if Turkey had permitted a northern front in March 2003, then the insurgency might not be as great as it is now. Basbug observed that such statements cannot create a good feeling about Turkey in the American public. "Sometimes our politicians don't speak properly either," he quickly added.

5. (S/NF) Basbug informed Gen Handy that after Gen Jones' visit, SACEUR called TGS Chief GEN Hilmi Ozkok to propose that a joint CENTCOM/EUCOM planning team visit TGS to discuss possible operations against the PKK/Kongra Gel in Iraq. "Maybe this time they will touch on real issues...I don't know," Basbug mused.

Cautious Optimism on Iraq

6. (C) Basbug asked Gen Handy for his impression of Iraq. Gen Handy replied that during his last visit there in March,

he was more enthused about developments than one can be from reading the media from Iraq. GEN Casey was very optimistic and morale among US troops was high. Basbug stated that post-election developments also made TGS optimistic about the future in Iraq. This doesn't mean fighting will stop tomorrow, but there is hope. He saw two factors as important to the outcome: 1) The Iraqi people's acceptance of the new government which must be effective to succeed; and, 2) the Iraqi people seeing their own armed forces taking responsibility for security from the coalition. The only other hurdle is the constitution drafting process. If no big problems emerge among the ethnic groups, then "there is nothing left (to do)." If they don't agree on some "special articles" in the constitution (a reference to the status of Kirkuk), "then I don't know what will happen," he concluded. The DCM told Basbug that the Iraqis were already beginning to address constitutional issues in their negotiations on the new ITG. One problem will be determining who represents the Sunni community. Nonetheless, he was also cautiously optimistic about the future in Iraq.

Incirlik AB Issues

17. (S) Gen Handy responded that it was important to maintain an honest and sincere military-to-military relationship. From USTRANSCOM, he wanted to relay to Basbug appreciation for the good treatment of US personnel at Incirlik AB and for Turkey's accommodation of US overflight requests, air refueling operations and other airlift operations in and over Turkey. Basbug noted that there were a few outstanding issues awaiting resolution:

-- Logistics Hub: TGS agrees to this proposal in principle and has conveyed its views to the government. While emphasizing that mil-mil talks to work out details could only occur after the government grants approval, he expected an answer "soon" and thought a clarification as to what "lethal cargo" would be included might accelerate the approval process. ODC-Turkey Chief Maj Gen Peter Sutton assured Basbug that the US side was working on a thorough response to this question. Gen Handy told Basbug that, while a hub would facilitate operations, the US could look for other options if it were a problem for Turkey to host it. Basbug replied that he understood that the issue was "crucial" for the USG, that he saw it as "workable," and that TGS had been pushing MFA to extract an answer from the politicians ASAP. Later in the conversation, Basbug asked whether airfields in Iraq could accommodate C5 aircraft; Gen Handy responded that major airports could, but not all. Gen Handy also noted attacks on aircraft in Iraq, making the point that only USAF aircraft with defensive systems were permitted to fly to/from Iraq.

-- Italians to Afghanistan: Basbug said TGS had had to turn this request to move Italian equipment destined for Herat around in a day, but that the problem was now solved. (Comment: In fact, the issue had been in discussion between ODC and TGS for awhile; ODC submitted the formal written request that Basbug was referring to only after receiving a verbal approval for the mission.)

-- UK Use of Incirlik to support flights to Afghanistan and Iraq: Basbug didn't provide any details, saying only that UK operations through Incirlik have not yet started. (Comment: The British Air Attache told our DATT last week that while FM Gul had informed Foreign Secretary Straw that the way was clear for UK use of the base, TGS had not yet engaged the British on the modalities.)

-- Weapons Training Deployments (WTDs): Basbug said that this proposal (temporary deployment of fighter aircraft to Incirlik for training) was still under discussion and that the ball was in the US court to call the next meeting.

ISAF Airlift

18. (C) Basbug reported that DSACEUR had requested that Turkey keep one C-130 aircraft in Afghanistan beyond its term of deployment, but that would not be possible due to maintenance difficulties. A more serious problem for ISAF, he noted, was the Dutch intention to withdraw three "armed helicopters." He understood that the US had already declined to fill that requirement.

19. (U) Gen Handy did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

110. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
EDELMAN